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LATIN AMERICAN TRENDS

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Western Hemisphere Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Argentina: The Senate Takes A Stand

Argentine legislators have moved to fill the post of provisional president of the Senate, which had been left vacant since last April in accordance with the wishes of President Peron. Italo Luder, a moderate Peronist who heads the chamber's Foreign Relations Committee, now becomes next in line for the Presidency should Maria Estela de Peron leave office. The move by the Senate is a tactical defeat for the President, who had deliberately kept the post open in hopes of precluding a move to oust her and to ensure her control over the presidental succession, should she decide to resign.

The election itself reflects at least a temporary erosion of the Peronist chain of command and highlights Mrs. Peron's failure to manage her own government coalition. The selection of Luder, who is not likely to be easily controlled by the President's wily mentor, Jose Lopez Rega, may presage further problems for the chief executive.

In keeping with the spirit of rebellion in which he was elected, Luder appeared to snub Mrs. Peron in his acceptance speech by not even mentioning her name and calling for "a new political framework: pluralist dialog." The 58-year-old senator from Buenos Aires Province gave special thanks to the loyal opposition, the Radical Civic Union, which had unanimously supported him.

A lawyer by profession, Luder is a specialist in constitutional law and a noted academician. He is frank and direct and has been described as level-headed and sensible. Luder is a pragmatist in foreign policy matters. He has stated that ideology, passion, and national shibboleths should have no place in foreign affairs,

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although he recognizes that a foreign policy must be packaged and presented in such a way as to be acceptable to domestic opinion. He has told US Embassy officers in Buenos Aires that he favors a close relationship between the United States and Argentina that would be mutually beneficial without infringing on Argentina's sovereignty. He visited this country briefly on a foreign leader grant in mid-1974.

With seemingly no one currently on the political scene who could capture the Argentine imagination, Luder appears to be one of the best of the available candidates. As one journalist commented when Luder was jeered by an ultra-right-wing Peronist group, "With enemies like that, Luder can't be all bad." His election, at the very least, is a plus for constitutionalism in Argentina. 3.5(c)

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